

seven hours a day, and that in point of fact their wages in winter came to be lower with 4d. an hour than they were previous to that demand. In the winter of 1846 another request was accordingly made, to the effect that the wages should be raised to 4½d. an hour, on the ground of high rate of provisions. This, in like manner, was agreed to by the masters; and notwithstanding the original agreement in 1841 for 4d. an hour, the men have continued to receive 2s. a week additional in the winter months down to the present year.

In January last the members of the union made another demand for 4½d. per hour throughout the whole year. This was also acceded to by the masters, who had heavy contracts on hand, of which the men took the advantage, and so reaped both their own profit and their masters', one of whom declares that the masters either made nothing by their heavy contracts, or positively lost on them, by this ruse of the men. In the beginning of the following May the masters, in their turn, combined, and insisted on a reduction of the wages to 4d. per hour, as in the former case. This the men resisted. Hence arose the plasterers' strike, which lasted three weeks. It terminated with the masters' acceding to the renewed demand, whereupon the men resumed their work. The union still is vigorous, and the wages still continue at 4½d. an hour—that is to say, 22s. 6d. per week.

A master, in speaking of these disputes, and of the present state of the trade, says, "No man can enter out employment without paying 2l. and becoming a member of the union. If he refuses, all the men in the shop will strike work; and more than that, some of our men who belong to the union, and who persisted in working after the strike, were also fined in pretty large sums. Regarding the manner in which our business is affected, I can only state that Edinburgh depends to a large extent on country work. If the wages continue long at the present rate, we shall ultimately lose this work. At Dalkeith, for example, our men will not work for less than 24s. 6d. per week. The men in the locality work for 20s. But we dare not employ these men if they do not belong to the union: our own men will strike; and hence we have not the slightest chance in competition with a country plasterer."

It is believed to be impossible that the plasterers can long expect to receive wages a halfpenny an hour higher than those of the masons, and a penny an hour higher than those of the wrights; or that the present arbitrary distinction between the wages in Edinburgh and the wages in the country can be maintained. A temporary suspension of the present demand for building in Glasgow, it is thought, would dissolve their union.

IRISH CONTRACTORS.

SEEING in your valuable paper of the 15th ultimo, an article quoted from *Lloyd's Newspaper*, stating that Mr. Dargan is a self-made man, and that he was originally a common labourer,—allow me to say that such is not the fact. William Dargan descended from a respectable family in the county of Carlow, and received a classical and scientific education in the college of Carlow; and I venture to say that there are very few engineers, architects, or contractors in the British empire better versed in general science or mathematics than he is. The journal you quoted remarks that there were no Brasseyes nor Petos in the sister country. Nevertheless, there were contractors of as high a stamp of qualification in their business as any in the United Kingdom,—viz. the firm of Henry, Mullins, and M'Mahon,—men qualified in every way to undertake the most difficult public or private works,—to say nothing of Mr. Mahon, the Congress engineer for the United States of America, who constructed the Croton Waterworks of New York, and also wrote a work on construction,—said to be the best extant. Let me also refer you to the elder Semple, who built Essex-bridge,

* Mr. Henry, one of the divisional magistrates in London, who sits in Bow-street, is by all acknowledged to be one of the most distinguished magistrates in the metropolis.

and wrote one of the best books on water-works that we have; and I think it but due to mention young Mr. Mullins, the engineer and contractor of the Kingstown Basin,—a young gentleman who has received several diplomas. I mention these circumstances to show what Mr. Dargan had to contend with, and, to quote the words of Mr. Bright at the Belfast dinner, "there is one gentleman who certainly ought never to be mentioned without respect in Ireland. I mean Mr. Dargan, the great railway contractor; and if the honours which monarchs bestow were worth much, and if they were bestowed where they ought to be, they would not be given to the bankrupt drones of the country, so much as to the captains and generals of industry, like Mr. Dargan." P. MCA.

Miscellaneous.

GAS.—The town of Spilshay is to be lighted with gas, if the steps now being taken to form a company prove successful. An attempt was made seventeen years since, but failed.—The Louth Gas Company have just announced a dividend of 8 per cent. besides a balance of 100l. on last year's sales. A resolution to reduce the price of gas from 6s. 8d. to 5s. 10d. was negatived.—At Swindon there is a gas consumers' association who are determined either to manufacture their own gas, or compel the present company to reduce their charge from 8s. 6d. to something like the half of that sum. Mr. A. L. Goddard, M.P. heads a list of names in support of this movement. The association, in reference to the high dividends and bonuses of the company, and the reservation of a fund out of the profits besides for the enlargement of their works, deprecate the system of creating capital out of income and at the expense of consumers, who are made in consequence to pay double the value of the article supplied them. The company, they consider, stand in precisely the relation of a tradesman with his customers, who, if he required money to enlarge his premises, did not think of making his customers find it for him by charging them beyond the value for goods they bought, but borrowed it; and on the same principle ought the gas company to raise fresh shares. Complaint is also made of the charge made for fittings; the company reserving to themselves the exclusive privilege of supplying them, "and thus before a person could consume the high-priced gas he must submit to pay an exorbitant sum for the channel through which it is to be conveyed."—Fifty Derby gas shares of 25l. each were sold by auction lately at 27l. 15s. and 28l. premium, per share.—The Dalton Gas-works are fast drawing to completion. The gas-tank is nearly finished, and the walls of the various buildings are raised considerably above ground. The contractors are Mr. R. Briggs, waller, and Mr. R. Briggs, joiner.—A gas-work on White's hydro-carbon principle has been erected at Methven Castle, near Dunkeld, for the lighting of the castle, which is now supplied with gas from its own establishment. Peat coal, or Scottish cannel, is used in the production of the gas.

THE METAL TRADES.—The *Gateshead Observer* states, in reference to a paragraph in our impression of the 23rd ult. that in that district at least, the actual advance of the price of iron is not less than 2l. per ton, and that at this advance contracts have been made by the ironmasters that will not be completed until the year 1853 is far spent. The old orders, it is also stated, are pretty nearly executed. In the Staffordshire district, it is said, many of the principal masters refuse to receive orders even at the present rates, and in some instances the orders are taken on condition that when executed the price be the then existing rate. These bargains, according to the *Birmingham Journal*, are made under the conviction that iron will be 10l. per ton before it is lower. Whatever be the results of such policy, there seems to be a strong inclination to carry it out by declarations of further advances still, in nominal prices at least, if not in actual. The same sort of towering and impatient ambition

to force up prices at all risks preceded the last great smash, which excited our pity. It is to be hoped they have benefited by past experience, and are now a little more certain of the safety of their footing than they then were.—A zinc vessel, of about 100 tons, called the *Comte le Hou*, is about to be launched at Nantes. This metal is cheaper than iron-plates, and will, it is believed, prove less liable to deterioration in water; but sailors are of opinion that in hot climates the zinc would speedily be covered with shells to an impeding extent.—A new patent metallic compound, in place of tinned iron plates, it is said, is about to appear in the market.

THE LATE MR. DOWNING, ARCHITECT.—With reference to our recent mention of Mr. Downing, the American architect and landscape gardener, a correspondent reminds us of a calamity that deprived our Transatlantic friends of a man of genius and worth. Mr. Downing was drowned with many others a few months ago by the burning of one of the Hudson River steam-boats, and it is supposed his life was sacrificed in endeavouring to rescue a lady passenger: his wife and some other members of his family were saved. About two years ago Mr. Downing came to this country and was introduced to Mr. Calvert Vaux, who was induced to return with him to Newburgh, and at the end of a year was taken into partnership. Mr. Vaux became much attached to one thus befriending him; and on his interment strewed his last with the flowers that the deceased had tended and loved so well.

FALL OF A RAILWAY BRIDGE.—On Friday in last week the Sheffield branch of the Midland Railway (the Sheffield and Rotherham line) was suddenly blocked up by the falling of a bridge that spans the line about 500 yards north of the Sheffield station. It was an iron girder bridge thrown over the railway a few years ago. The four girders rested on lateral buttresses, and were supported in the centre by brackets springing from the buttresses immediately beneath the ends of the iron beams. The area of the bridge was about 20 feet by 30 feet, and the whole structure being of iron, covered by a layer of earth, its weight was considerable for a bridge having no intervening columns between the extremities. The Ashlar stone upon which the brackets have rested is torn away from which fact it would seem as if the failure of the stone had caused the downfall. Nothing had occurred before the accident to suggest the slightest apprehension.

LOCAL MUSEUMS AND SCHOOLS OF ART.—The Government Department of Practical Art have announced that so far as Parliament may place means at their disposal, it will be their wish to encourage and assist, though not to supersede, local efforts in promoting art-education among the people by means of collections of works of art.—It has also been intimated that it is the intention of the Board of Trade to establish schools of design at Gloucester, Hereford, Brecon, and Carmarthen. The object of these schools is to teach elementary drawing to artisans and others to whom it is essential in the successful prosecution of their respective callings.—The annual meeting of the Nottingham School was held on Friday, in last week, when a favourable report of progress was made, and prizes were distributed. The meeting was addressed by the mayor and other gentlemen, and appropriate resolutions were passed.

DEATH IN THE SEWERS.—Another of those unfortunate but instructive accidents, which occasionally show what the sewers are capable of doing, has just occurred in Conington-street, Goswell-road, where four men, in successively attempting to descend into a foul sewer, became insensible, and two of them were killed on the spot, while a third may not recover. It is strange, indeed, that many cannot see, that if a concentration of the foul influence of sewers will cut down a man in a moment, the dilution of the same influence, to whatever extent, short of what constant and thorough ventilation must produce, cannot but tend, though more slowly, to do deadly work when breathed throughout our towns.